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Language, Truthmaking, and Logic

Logicians claim that there are certain basic arithmetical statements (or inference rules) which are true (or truth-preserving) by stipulation or convention. These stipulations, they say, are partly constitutive of the meanings of our basic arithmetical words – words like ‘plus’ and ‘zero.’ They argue that many, or perhaps all, the truths of pure arithmetic are consequences of these basic stipulations or conventions. Many of those who favour logicism do so for epistemological reasons. Having discussed the epistemology of logicism elsewhere, in this talk I will consider metaphysics. To put it crudely for now, my proposal will be this. If a purely arithmetical sentence is true, its truth is wholly metaphysically explained by the relevant linguistic conventions or stipulations. That is, arithmetical truths are ‘analytic’ in a particular, metaphysical sense of that difficult term. This claim should appeal to physicalists. For suppose it is correct that the relevant linguistic conventions and stipulations are on their own sufficient to metaphysically explain the truths of pure arithmetic. Then it would follow that there is no need to look to a non-physical ‘third realm’ to find truthmakers or grounds for pure arithmetic. We could thus reconcile our acceptance of arithmetic with a commitment to physicalism, construed as the claim that all truths have physical truthmakers, or that every fact has a physical ground.